

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. An information retrieving apparatus for retrieving target information from plural pieces of candidate information, comprising:

a storage means for storing the plural pieces of the candidate information in a hierarchical structure including  $m$  hierarchies ( $m$  is a natural number not less than 2);

an input means for inputting information;

a judging means for judging a correspondence of the inputted information with one of the plural pieces of the candidate information and for judging the hierarchy of the candidate information if the correspondence is obtained; and

a retrieving means for retrieving one of the plural pieces of the candidate information as a target information based on a judged result of the judging means.

2. An information retrieving apparatus according to claim 1, wherein the hierarchical structure is arranged such that each piece of the candidate information belonging to  $(n+1)$ -th hierarchy ( $n$  is a natural number and  $n < m-1$ ) is associated with one of the plural pieces of the candidate information belonging to  $n$ -th hierarchy.

3. An information retrieving apparatus according to claim 2, further comprising an output means for outputting input request information which requests a user to input an input information corresponding to the candidate information belonging to one hierarchy of the hierarchical structures,

wherein the output means comprises:

means for outputting the input request information requesting the input of the candidate information belonging to the (p+1)-th hierarchy if the candidate information belonging to the p-th hierarchy is inputted in response to the input request information requesting the input of the candidate information belonging to the p-th hierarchy (p is a natural number and  $p < m-1$ ); and

means for outputting the input request information requesting the input of the candidate information belonging to the (p+q+1)-th hierarchy if the candidate information belonging to the (p+q)-th hierarchy is inputted in response to the input request information requesting the input of the candidate information belonging to the p-th hierarchy (q is a natural number and  $(p+q) < m-1$ ).

4. An information retrieving apparatus according to claim 3, wherein said output means further comprises means for outputting the input request information requesting the input of the candidate information in r-th hierarchy (r is a natural number and  $r < m-1$ ) if no candidate information is inputted for a predetermined time in response to input request information requesting the input of the candidate information belonging to the r-th hierarchy.

5. An information retrieving apparatus according to claim 4, wherein the candidate information comprises a plurality of candidate information groups each including the plural pieces of the candidate information in one hierarchy, wherein the

664020" 6T044019 020499

candidate information included in one candidate information group is different from the candidate information included in another candidate information groups, and wherein, if no input information corresponding to the candidate information is inputted for a predetermined time in response to input request information requesting the input of the candidate information included in one candidate information group, the output means outputs the input request information requesting the input of the candidate information included in a candidate information group other than said one candidate information group.

6. An information retrieval apparatus according to claim 5, wherein the output means outputs the input request information in a form of voice, wherein the information inputted through the input means is voice information, and wherein the input means comprises a voice recognition means for recognizing a content of the inputted voice information.

7. A method of retrieving target information from plural pieces of candidate information composing a hierarchical structure including  $m$  hierarchies ( $m$  is a natural number not less than 2), wherein the hierarchical structure is arranged such that each piece of the candidate information belonging to  $(n+1)$ -th hierarchy ( $n$  is a natural number and  $n < m-1$ ) is associated with one of the plural pieces of the candidate information included in  $n$ -th hierarchy, the method comprising the steps of:

receiving voice information;

judging a correspondence of inputted voice information

with one of the plural pieces of the candidate information and for judging the hierarchy of the candidate information if the correspondence is obtained; and

retrieving one of the plural pieces of the candidate  
5 information as a target information based on a judged result of the judging step.

8. A storage medium carrying, in a computer-readable manner, an information retrieving program for retrieving target  
10 information from plural pieces of candidate information composing a hierarchical structure including  $m$  hierarchies ( $m$  is a natural number not less than 2), wherein the hierarchical structure is arranged such that each piece of the candidate information belonging to  $(n+1)$ -th hierarchy ( $n$  is a natural  
15 number and  $n < m-1$ ) is associated with one of the plural pieces of the candidate information included in  $n$ -th hierarchy, said program controls a computer device to function as:

an input control means for controlling information inputted;

20 a judging means for judging a correspondence of the inputted information with one of the plural pieces of the candidate information and for judging the hierarchy of the candidate information if the correspondence is obtained; and

a retrieving means for retrieving one of the plural pieces  
25 of the candidate information as a target information based on a judged result of the judging means.

9. The storage medium according to claim 8, wherein the program controls the computer device to cause the input control

means to control a voice information inputted.

10. An information retrieving apparatus for retrieving target information from plural pieces of candidate information, comprising:

a storage means for storing the plural pieces of the candidate information in a hierarchical structure including a plurality of hierarchies;

an input means for inputting information;

a determining means for determining the candidate information corresponding to the inputted information; and

a retrieving means for retrieving one of the plural pieces of candidate information which belong to the lower hierarchy of the determined candidate information and are associated with the determined candidate information.

ADD A1